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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed and implemented to reduce the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs, and to help minority students improve their academic achievement in Westmoreland County, Virginia. The practicum involved examining the gifted student nomination/identification process to see if instruments or procedures were culturally biased. Alternatives were implemented, the nomination/identification form was adapted to include an expanded case study approach, and gifted staff development on cultural diversity was conducted. Staff development focused on instructional systems that are recommended specifically when working with black students. Results of the practicum were positive--minority students receiving gifted services increased, a significant number of minority students improved their academic achievement, and teachers felt that staff development assisted them with classroom climate and instructional strategies. (Contains 45 references.) (JDD)

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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM TO IMPROVE SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

by

Rita-Anne Z. Bigelow

Cluster 32

A Practicum II Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

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March 21, 1993

This practicum report was submitted by Rita-Anne Z. Bigelow under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

June 10, 1993
Date of Final Approval

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ABSTRACT

Developing and implementing a program to improve school success for minority students. Bigelow, Rita-Anne Z., 1993: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. At- Risk/Gifted/Minorities/Staff Development/ Elementary/Curriculum/Education/Teaching/Rural.

This practicum was designed and implemented to reduce the under-representation of minority students in gifted programs by adapting the nomination/identification form to include an expanded case study approach and redesigning gifted staff development. A secondary goal was that minority students would improve their academic achievement.

The gifted nomination/identification process was examined to see if instruments used or procedures followed were culturally biased; alternatives were considered; and implemented alternatives which included staff development on cultural diversity. The at-risk component provided staff development on instructional systems that are recommended specifically when working with black students.

The results of the practicum were positive. Minority students receiving gifted services increased and a significant number of minority students did improve their academic achievement. Teachers indicated that staff development provided a perception that assisted with classroom climate and instructional strategies.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum took place in one of the counties that comprise a peninsula webbed with a network of creeks and inlets. It is located a few hours drive from the nation's capital and from four "emerging" cities on the Eastern Seaboard.

Due to poor roads, a few bridges and no railroad, water has isolated this area and until recently protected residents from development. Retirees and second-home owners or investors have been relocating here. The northern population of the county is increasing due to military facilities closing in the United States and the transfer of military and civilian personnel to a nearby military base. But a small town, rural atmosphere still prevails. Looking at the Regional Economic Outlook (Lynch, 1989), this area is part of the "golden" triangle. This Mid-Atlantic region is experiencing and will experience the fastest growth in the nation.

This county, named for a British shire, was established in 1653 by the colonial government in Jamestown. It is rich in history as it is noted as the birthplace and home of more statesmen of National stature than any other county in the United States.

The population of the county is 15,480 with whites comprising 66%; blacks 33%, Asian 0.4%; and Hispanics 0.6% (Staff, 1991, September 5). Primary occupations are farming and water-related jobs, including seafood processing. Other major categories include

construction, education, government work, lumbering and manufacturing. In 1988, the average weekly salary in this county was $242 per week, while in surrounding counties the average weekly salaries were $293 per week. The average state salary was $405 per week. Forty-eight percent of the students in the school division received free or reduced price lunch during the 1990-91 school year compared to the state's 24% (Department of Education, 1992). Half of the county's population over the age of 25 years did not finish high school (11.2 years in the county and 11.5 years in the surrounding counties) and unemployment is steadily increasing (Chesser & Barnes, 1990). The actual structures of many parents personal lives consist of menial jobs, underemployment, and unemployment.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The county consists of 236 square miles and houses five county schools. The school system serves approximately 2,000 students in grades Pre-K through 12 with approximately sixty percent of the population being black and thirty-nine percent white. There are three elementary schools (grades Pre-K - 5), a middle school, and a high school. In addition, the school system participates in a Regional Special Education Program, a Regional Vocational Program, and a Regional Adult Education Program.

The writer's administrative responsibilities include: coordinator of gifted programs, K-12; public relations; remedial programs; staff development; adult basic education programs; and educational testing.

As coordinator of gifted programs, the writer's primary function is to provide leadership in development and implementation of a differentiated instructional program for identified gifted students and to assist in integrating it with the division's total learning program.

Some of the writer's performance responsibilities are to coordinate and supervise all activities related to and the placement and review of all students in the gifted program; to coordinate the planning of the inservice activities for the program; and to coordinate the internal development of curriculum materials, instructional packages, and activities.

Some public relations responsibilities are to plan, organize, write, and/or arrange for photo/articles from the schools to the local newspapers and for external radio and television spot announcements for the division. Additional responsibilities are to assist principals or designees on maintaining an on-going PR campaign within the building and to coordinate teacher recruitment displays and materials.

In the area of remedial programs and staff development, the writer assists central office personnel in the development, implementation, and evaluation of these programs as assigned. The writer also serves as the division's designated Adult Basic Education Program's representative to the Regional Adult Education Program. Additional responsibilities are to secure local funding, support services and materials and to participate annually in the evaluation of the local program.

The writer's background and training include a master of arts in education. The writer holds state certification in supervision, director of instruction, elementary principal, middle school principal, learning disabled, educable mentally handicapped, and pre-school handicapped. She has had graduate training in the education of the gifted. At this time, state certification in gifted education is non-existent. The writer has had 13 1/2 years' teaching experience, 1 1/2 years' experience as a regional coordinator of special education,

and approximately 5 years' experience as coordinator in the writer's school division. The writer has been employed by the State Department of Education as Director of this area's Regional Governor's Summer School, Programs for Middle School Gifted Students, for the past two years.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

There was underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs and there was overrepresentation of minority students in the "at-risk" program.

The student population in the writer's division consisted of sixty-one percent minority students to thirty-nine percent white students. The majority of the minority students were black. The division's teaching staff was composed of thirty percent black to seventy percent white.

Three percent of the division's (K-12) minority student population were receiving gifted services compared to 13% of the white student population. Among young children who were potentially or functionally gifted, those from low income homes were the most likely to be unidentified and as a result not appropriately programmed for. Among those from low income homes, the ones most likely to be overlooked were black.

Minority students comprised 13/14 students in the 5th grade (ages 10-12) in the bottom quartile at one of the division's elementary school and at the division's middle school, minority students (ages 12-16) comprised 79% of the bottom quartile compared to 21% white students.

Problem Documentation

The underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs was well documented. During the 1991-92 school year, only 3% of blacks-Non-Hispanic were represented division wide while

comprising 60% of the student population. Zero percent of the 1% Hispanic/Asian population were not represented while 13% of the 39% whites were represented.

Minority students participating in the regional governor's gifted summer schools were few.

Table 1

Middle School Participants in Regional Governor's Gifted Summer School Program

Total Number of Participants - 48			
Year	Total	Black	White
1990	14	1	13
1991	18	6	12
1992	16	2	14

The overrepresentation of minority students in "at-risk" programs was also well documented. An analysis of one of the elementary principal's report of fifth grade "at-risk" students who scored in the lower quartile numbered fourteen. Racial composition consisted of 8 black males; 4 black females; 1 white male and 1 Asian male. Seven of the 8 black males were overage for grade placement.

The middle school principal's report indicated that 105 students were identified in the "at-risk" category. The racial composition at this level was 76% black, 21% white, and 3% Hispanic.

Results of the 1992 OAP indicated that the following problems existed in the division:

a. Only 48% of the division's 4th grade students, who participated in the State Assessment Program, composite scores were above the national 50% percentile compared to the State's 62%.

b. Seventeen percent of the division's 4th grade students were 11 or more years of age compared to the State's 5%.

c. Eighty-four percent of the division's students in grades K-5 were absent 10 days or less from school compared to the State's 72%.

d. Sixty-three percent of 6th grade students passed all three Literacy Passport tests compared to the State's 72%.

Causative Analysis

Several causes for the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs and the overrepresentation of minority students in the "at-risk" program were considered.

Various factors have contributed to the underserving of black children in gifted programs. Attitudes of teachers have been one stumbling block. Some teachers believed that a child from a poor home can not possibly be gifted, and if that child happened to be black, the belief may have been stronger. Another factor has been the misuse of testing instruments and procedures. The division had over-relied on standardized tests to establish a potential pool of gifted minority students. Lack of advocates for the identification and/or nurturance for black students have been another cause. Consequently, few teacher nominations for minority students were received.

The division's teaching staff was 70% white and 30% black. Teachers had received inadequate training of cultural characteristics of minority students. Cultural misunderstandings frequently have had a negative effect on minority students academic performance. Teachers who misinterpreted or disregarded cultural and language diversity have contributed to minority students lowered self-esteem, lowered achievement, and lowered self-expectations. Also teachers were not aware of learning style differences of minority students and that they needed to incorporate these differences into their instructional strategies.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

Culture plays a crucial role in human development and education but the role of culture is complex and not well understood. When conducting human development studies, cultural outcomes need to be differentiated from mental or maturational outcomes (Slaughter, 1988). Research development on minority populations has not made this type of distinction. Non-white minorities are expected to conform to white middle class developmental outcomes and processes. Slaughter (1988) states that comparative studies outside the United States show that developmental outcomes are due to differences in cultural tasks and cultural requirements. The relationship between culture, development, and school performance appears to be more complicated in that it involves historical, structural, and psychological factors not ordinarily considered by observers of human development.

Research has addressed the connection between experiences within families, a child's cognitive development, and school success. Two frequently made observations are: "there is substantial variation

by social class and race in child-rearing practices, principally in language usage, parental teaching strategies, and other forms of cognitive stimulation; and these differences, which operate in favor of those with high social status, affect cognitive development and school performance" (Jaynes & Williams, 1989, p. 372).

Clark's (1983) ethnographic study of 10 black low-income families reported that families of high achieving children tended to be warm and nurturing, set clear academic and behavioral standards, and monitored their children's actions and schoolwork. Families with a low achieving child were characterized by feelings of depression, lack of personal control, and low emotional spirit. This climate had adverse consequences for parental guidance and monitoring of children and for a child's performance in school.

Contemporary views of the status of black-white relations in America vary widely. Perspectives range from optimism that main problems have been solved, to assessments that the nation is retrogressing and moving toward increased racial disparities. "To some observers, the present situation is only another episode in a long history of recurring cycles of apparent improvement that are followed by new forms of dominance in changed contexts" (Jaynes & Williams, Jr., 1989, p. 14). Minority and culturally diverse students have not been identified for gifted programs in proportion to their representation in public schools.

The underrepresentation of minority students receiving gifted services originates with the establishment of a "pool" of students. "Discrimination, either purposeful and inadvertent, does exist and special efforts must be made to ensure that black children have the opportunity to achieve to their potential" (Rhoades, 1992, p. 108).

Although no single instrument, such as an intelligence or an academic test, is used for identification purposes, it may be used to initiate the screening process for potential candidates of a gifted program. This proves to be a major limitation to the identification of minority students as this instrument contains cultural bias and depends upon traditional measures of performances (VanTassel-Baska, 1981). Miller-Jones (1981) reiterates that standardized tests are culturally biased in content, language and format, test items are not based on any definite theory of cognitive or intellectual functioning, and achievement tests center on those who understand the testing game. As a result of testing, there is a "clash between cultures that manifests itself through dominant culture's inability to acknowledge and a bias to underestimate the abilities of of minorities" (Brunch, 1975, p. 167). This discriminates against students who have not participated fully in the dominant culture. VanTassel-Baska (1981) suggests that disadvantaged populations, including rural students, may not be identified as gifted as educators concentrate on their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Some educators view their role in the public school "as that of raising skills to a minimum standard only, and not concerning themselves with the larger job of educating to levels of potential ability" (VanTassel-Baska, 1981, p. 12).

Many classroom teachers rely on traditional measures of school achievement, such as intelligence and achievement tests, to initiate nominations of potential candidates. Further compounding the issue, Marland (1972) and Rhoades (1992) indicate that many classroom teachers are not trained in gifted education and will report grades and recommendations that will screen out at least half of the qualified and talented students. In addition, classroom teachers need additional

training and information in order to recognize gifted minorities. They need to "gain an understanding of the reasons behind Black low achievement, and why Black children are often perceived as low achievers" (Rhoades, 1992, p. 109). Ogbu (1978) offers an explanation that subcultures often steer clear of school based on their prior history of school failure.

Low socioeconomic levels contribute to low achievement as parents have few educational resources in the home and students found in this environment "can appear to be less intelligent then they actually are " (Rhoades, 1992, p. 109).

The overrepresentation of minority students identified as at-risk is intensified by teacher insensitivity and a lack of knowledge. Educational reform has imposed higher standards in the public schools which has affected minority and disadvantaged students who are at-risk (Donnelly, 1987; Lehr & Harris, 1988). Usually, at-risk students are students who are not experiencing success in school and have a higher frequency of suspensions and drop-out rates (Donnelly, 1987; Rhoades, 1992). Disproportionate numbers of at-risk students are males and minorities and usually, they are from low socioeconomic status families. Minority parents may have low educational backgrounds and may not have high expectations for their children (Donnelly, 1987; Howard, 1987).

Literature verifies the belief that some teachers do communicate lower expectations towards students and they believe them to be less capable (Good, 1981; Lehr & Harris, 1988). Rankin, 1988 (cited in ASCD Update), "thinks we have created individual differences [in students], often by not demanding enough and they are more at- risk because we have not demanded what they can achieve than they are

because we have taught over their heads" (p. 3). Numerous instructors still believe in the bell curve when it applies to achievement (Willis, 1991). School then becomes a negative environment that reinforces low self-esteem (DeBlois, 1989; Donnelly, 1987; Rhoades, 1992). At-risk students become disenchanted with school and this is evidenced by their high level of absenteeism and lack of participation in school activities (DeBlois, 1989). Students drop out of school because they feel alienated from school.

The most common characteristic that dropouts share "is that they are two years behind their peers in reading and math skills, and that by the time they reach seventh grade, they have been kept back in grade for one or more years" (DeBlois, 1989, p. 6).

Factors that contribute to both the underrepresentation of minority students receiving gifted services and the overrepresentation of minority students in the at-risk programs include "Discrimination, either purposeful or inadvertent, does exist in today's public schools" (Rhoades, 1992, p. 108). Boutte (1992) relates from personal experience pertaining to her daughter that teachers "must carefully examine the idea of ability grouping .... black children are disproportionately placed in low-ability groups for no justifiable reason" (p.787).

Due to low socioeconomic conditions, parents have few resources available to provide an educational home environment (Haberman, 1991; Rhoades, 1992). Compounding the issue, parents may have failed or done poorly in school and may feel alienated from school.

Educators tend to ignore learning styles and utilize a single approach to all students (Ewing & Yong, 1992). Much of today's

education continues to be dominated by a left-brained curriculum as textbooks are the backbone of classroom instruction (Vitale, 1985). Personal difference in learning styles depend on many variables: "who we are, where we are, how we see ourselves, what we pay attention to, and what people ask and expect of us" (McCarthy, 1990, p. 3).

Walker & Dansky state that "student perceptions of teacher behavior are often a determinant in the decision to remain in school. Thirty-one percent of males and ten percent of females surveyed stated that a primary reason in their decision to leave school was their inability to 'get along' with teachers." Consequently, classroom teachers have numerous occasions to influence students to remain or to leave school.

If at-risk students are to be kept in school, educators must believe that students "have the capacity to become more than minimally educated, and that school can be the primary place where this learning begins in earnest" (DeBlois, 1989, p. 6). Curriculum, at the middle school, usually does not combine acceleration, inter-disciplinary team projects, and technological vocational exploration.

Culture is complex and not well understood, yet plays a significant role in human development and education. It varies according to social class and race which affects child rearing practices. Testing involves understanding the "game" of the dominant culture. Results of testing may influence minority students in one of two ways: possible nomination for a gifted program or eligibility for remedial services. When teachers are asked to describe student progress, they rely on their grade books and exhibited classroom behaviors. With the at-risk population, educators usually concentrate

on remediation to meet minimum standards rather than implementing instructional systems that would enable students to reach their highest potential.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

This practicum was designed to address problems encountered by minority students and school success. One goal that was projected for this practicum was that more minority students would participate in gifted programs. An additional projected goal was that minority students would improve their academic achievement.

Behavioral Objectives

The following objectives were projected for this practicum:

Objective 1: By February 15, 1993, based on the December 1992 division's enrollment figures, 4% of the total minority student population will be receiving gifted services.

Objective 2: By the end of the third grading period in the 1992-93 School Year, 80% of the students identified in the bottom quartile at one elementary school (grades 4 & 5) and at the middle school (grades 6-8) will improve at least one letter grade in one academic area as compared with report card grades received at the end of the first grading period.

Measurement of Objectives

Measurement of objective one was based on the December 1992 division's enrollment figures and the percentage of minority students receiving gifted services by February 15, 1993.

Measurement of objective two was based on the evaluation of the first three nine-week grading periods in the 1992-93 School Year for students who were identified in the bottom quartile at one elementary school (grades 4 & 5). Students were to improve in at least one letter

grade in one academic area as compared with report card grades received at the end of the first grading period. The academic areas compared where those that corresponded to the identified academic area on the bottom quartile roster based on the results of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS).

No formal questionnaire or assessment instrument was devised. Measurement was based on comparison of the first grading period with the two concurrent grading periods.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Possible Solutions

There was an underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs and an overrepresentation of minority students in the at-risk program.

Classroom teachers need to be made aware that problems exist when using standardized test scores as the basis for the nomination process. Rhoades (1992) indicates that "several studies reveal problems associated with standardized testing, particularly cultural bias. Although many classroom teachers are familiar with the term, few understand its implications" (p. 108). Standardized tests do not focus on the individual student. Selection criteria for gifted programs needs to be examined to see if it discriminates against minorities and if the criteria relies heavily on test scores, alternatives need to be considered (VanTassel-Baska, 1981). Baldwin (1977, 1987) has also established a powerful rationale for diversified identification procedures when identifying culturally diverse students.

Bessant-Byrd & Lang (1990) suggest that a collaborative nominations procedure be included which will promote equitable identification of minority students for gifted programs. Home, school, and community needs to be part of the collaborative effort in identifying gifted students.

Rather than relying on standardized testing (Bessant-Byrd & Lang, 1990; Rhoades, 1992; VanTassel-Baska, 1981), optional formal and informal instruments should be utilized. Identification criteria should correspond with program objectives (Roedell, Jackson, and Robinson, 1980; VanTassel-Baska, 1981) and if necessary, a "bridge"

concept of selection could be used (Bessant-Byrd & Lang, 1990). The bridge concept proposed by Bessant-Byrd & Lang (1990) " is based on the rationale that it is better to err by inclusion than by exclusion ..... students (would) 'bridge' the program for a limited period during which master teachers will provide them with a variety of learning experiences using a variety of modalities" (p.4). As a result, students will be afforded the opportunity of a strong possibility of identification for inclusion in the program.

Staff development that includes the nature on recognizing gifted minorities (Rhoades, 1992) should be developed. VanTassel-Baska (1981) suggests that identification procedures should include "parent, teacher or community checklists that include special characteristics that have been noted for culturally different students who have been identified as gifted" (p.13).

Educational reform with respect to meeting the unique needs of at-risk students can not be addressed by increasing course requirements, raising teachers' salaries, or increasing the amount of instructional time. These reforms can not be substituted for direct or comprehensive strategies to solve the problems of at-risk students. Levin (1988) states that specific goals and strategies to improve educational conditions for at-risk students should start at the elementary level and include techniques to enhance the quality of student work so that by the time students enter high school, they are able to benefit from regular instruction.

Formulation of the curriculum and instructional decision needs to be made by the instructional staff with the principal serving as the instructional leader and the information, technical assistance, and training can be provided by district personnel (Levin, 1988). Parents

and schools need to become unified and support the same educational goals (Epstein, 1987). Levin (1988) supports the position that opportunities need to be developed that affords parental participation in determining educational goals for their children along with effective utilization of community resources such as senior citizens, businesses, community, retired military, and religious groups. An accelerated curriculum, which "includes a heavily language-based approach, even in mathematics" should be developed (Levin, 1988, p.5) and it should relate to real life experiences which would include problem-solving (Haberman, 1991; Levin, 1988).

Other instructional strategies should include:

a. computer-assisted learning (Haberman, 1991);
b. cooperative learning (Haberman, 1991; Howard, 1987; Levin, 1988; Watson & Rangel, 1989);
c. direct instruction (Haberman, 1991);
d. individual instruction (Haberman, 1991);
e. learning centers (Howard, 1987);
f. mastery learning (Howard, 1987);
g. media assisted instruction (Haberman, 1991).
h. peer tutoring (Freedburg, 1989; Haberman, 1991; Howard, 1987; Levin, 1988);
i. scientific inquiry (Haberman, 1991);
j. student contracts (Haberman, 1991; Howard, 1987);
k. tutoring by specialists or volunteers (Haberman, 1991).

Other instructional systems that need to be investigated in detail and programmed for as they are recommended specifically when working with black students are: achievement motivation, locus of control, learning styles, cultural factors, and disruptive or delinquent behavior (Howard, 1987).

Evaluation of the possible solutions in the literature to increase minority representation in the gifted program indicate a need for diverse identification procedures, a collaborative effort which includes the home, school, and community, and if necessary, the use of a

"bridge" concept of selection. Gifted staff development should be expanded to include characteristics of gifted minority students. This component needs to become part of the continuous process of gifted education staff development.

Educational reform with respect to meeting the unique needs of black at-risk students needs to begin at the elementary level and include strategies to enhance the quality of student work. The principal needs to be the instructional leader working collaboratively with the instructional staff and central office personnel regarding curriculum development and instructional decisions. An accelerated curriculum which relates to real life experiences and includes problem solving should be developed. Staff development for both teachers of identified gifted students and at-risk minority students should be developed that includes achievement motivation, locus of control, learning styles, cultural factors, and disruptive or delinquent behavior.

Description of Solutions Selected

The writer believes that the solutions offered in the literature pertaining to the underrepresentation of minority students can be implemented with the designated population in the writer's worksetting.

Classroom teachers need to be made aware that problems exist when using results of standardized test scores as the basis of the gifted nomination "pool" (Rhoades, 1992). An examination of the selection criteria for gifted programs needs to see if it discriminates against minorities and if the criteria relies heavily on test scores, alternatives need to be considered (VanTassel-Baska, 1981). Baldwin (1977, 1987) suggests that diversified identification procedures need to be

considered when identifying cultural diverse students. Program objectives will be evaluated to see if they correspond with identification criteria (Roedell, Jackson, and Robinson, 1980) and if necessary, a "bridge" concept of selection will be implemented (Bessant-Byrd & Lang, 1990).

Staff development that includes the nature of recognizing gifted minorities (Rhoades, 1992) will be developed and teacher/parent checklists will be modified to include special characteristics that have been noted for culturally different gifted students (VanTassel-Baska, 1981).

The solutions can assist the writer in achieving an increase of the total minority student population receiving gifted services.

The educational reform needed to meet the unique needs of the black at-risk students requires staff development that is long term and includes a progression of activities. Marks (1980) states that the most effective staff development is that which is a continuous process with specific goals and purposes. Specific inservice activities then should be designed based on the long term goals of the complete staff development plan. Therefore, inservice modules will be developed that compliment the long term goal of developing an accelerated curriculum which relates to real life experiences, including problem solving, along with instructional systems that are recommended specifically when working with black students. They are: achievement motivation, locus of control, learning styles, cultural factors, and disruptive or delinquent behavior. The writer believed that when teachers become aware of what achievement motivation is; of what locus of control is; of what learning style is; and what causes

disruptive behavior; and how teacher behaviors communicate postive expectations; the writer's goal and objective pertaining to to the bottom quartile would be met.

Report of Action Taken

This practicum was designed to increase the number of minority students receiving gifted services and to improve school success for those students identified at the bottom quartile.

The writer consulted with one elementary school principal and with the middle school principal regarding the implementation of this practicum. Both principals had previously expressed concerns regarding the lack of school success with the minority student population and they both agreed to participate. Spring standardized test scores were analyzed to formulate the bottom quartile for the 1992-93 school year for both participating schools.

At the August Staff Retreat, a formal presentation was made to all principals and central office personnel regarding the underrepresentation of minority students receiving gifted services and the overrepresentation of minority students in the bottom quartile. An invitation was extended to the principals that selected topic(s) could be presented to their faculties, if they so desired.

Permission was obtained to house a "mini-resource" center at the Teachers' Resource Center on the theme of improving school success for minority students. Articles collected concentrated on the politics of education as they influence programs for minority students as well as environmental at-risk factors that students may experience. Training manuals, videos, curriculum and instructional resources as well as classroom and student resources were also procured.

During the public relations fall information meeting that was

held for principals and/or public relations designees, staff development was offered at the building level on strategies for successful communication between home and school.

Concurrently, an analysis of the gifted identification process and program components were undertaken. It was determined that the majority of nominations came from a gleaning of test scores and not from teacher or parent nominations. The current level of services to the gifted population was strictly in academic areas. Also, the writer consulted with the Teacher of the Migrant Success Program for her input on the identification process and whether standardized tests should be administered in the student's native language.

The identification component was expanded to include part of the recommended identification protocol for selecting groups of "At-Risk Gifted Learners" (Ward, Jr., Ward, Landrum, & Patton, 1992). Teachers were asked to complete the Learning Characteristics, Motivational Characteristics, Creativity Characteristics, and Leadership Characteristics of the Scales for Rating Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, & Hartman, 1976). During the inschool screening committee meeting, teachers were asked to describe classroom observations which would indicate possible gifted potential. Work samples were to be considered a viable part of the nomination/identification process.

Students recommended at the inschool screening committee meeting were administered an individual battery consisting of instruments covering the domains of general intellectual ability and specific academic achievement or in small groups, a general intellectual ability group instrument. Selection of the testing battery was based on teacher recommendations of known environmental

factors. If it was determined that the student was from a low socio-economic background and/or a minority, choices were made from the student assessment protocol suggested by Project Mandala.

Parents were requested to complete a checklist and description form. This checklist was modified to include VanTassel-Baska's (1981) suggested special characteristics of culturally different students. The parent description form included anecdotes of the student in the home that indicated unusual capacity and early development and the student's out-of-school activities and interests.

The nomination/identification form was modified to include the results of testing which included standardized testing, small group and/or individual testing; summary statements of classroom observations/behaviors and parental statements; current classroom performance; and prior grades. Work samples were attached. This compilation was presented at the county gifted placement committee meetings as evidence of meeting eligibility criteria.

The writer also made the necessary preparations to conduct the staff development program for the gifted program and began researching and developing instructional systems modules for the at-risk portion of this practicum. All essential materials, supplies, and equipment were obtained by personal or county funds.

An inservice on "Recognizing and Nurturing Giftedness in Minority Learners" was presented at all the elementary schools and at the middle school during the months of September through December.

The inservice purposes included:

1. To share characteristics of gifted learners
    a. in general
    b. specific to minorities
2. To explore approaches to identification of minorities for "Programs for Advanced Learners (PAL)"
3. To share successful approaches for working with minority PAL students.

Participants were given an overview of the county demographics and how it impacted on the division's student population.

Subtopics included:

Characteristics of Giftedness (to look for in) Diverse Populations

Non-traditional Identification Practices

Recommended Interventions with Minority Gifted Students

What Teachers Can Do

This inservice training was presented through lecture and overhead transparencies, along with a question and answer period. Each teacher received a "Recognizing and Nurturing Giftedness in Minority Learners" handout. Also, relevant journal articles, excerpts from the division's proposed student nomination forms, and a list of teacher resources were distributed to participants. This component of the practicum was dependent upon the information that was being researched, implemented, and disseminated by Project Mandala, (Baytopps, 1990-1992), a project funded by The Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Act of 1988.

The writer's school division was not a participant of this

program but the writer believed that the school division mirrored the population addressed by Project Mandala and could benefit from the unpublished materials. Resources and materials that were available to teachers were displayed and were made available for circulation. Support services that were also available from the coordinator were discussed.

The next phase of the practicum pertaining to minority gifted students consisted of arranging inschool screening committee meetings at all elementary schools and at the middle school; obtaining permission to further evaluate; testing (individual and/or small group); and county placement committee meetings.

Approximately seventy students were screened with the recommendation that thirty-three students be evaluated for possible placement in the division's gifted program.

The implementation and development of the instructional systems for at-risk minority students extended throughout the practicum period. Fifteen teachers and the school's principal participated. Teacher training modules were designed using materials from Mid-Atlantic Center for Race Equity. They were:

Improving Minority Student Achievement: Focus on the Classroom

Specific modules included -

Teacher Expectation: A Review of the Research

Black and Hispanic Students, An Educational Overview - Reviewing Present Conditions

Identifying Behaviors that Establish a Positive Climate - Climate Variables

Establishing a Positive Climate for Selected Students
Providing Academic Support for Selected Students

Learning to Persist/Persisting to Learn: A Teacher Training Manual with Student Activities to Encourage Persistence In School.

Teacher training modules and instructional strategies that support persistence used were:

Module 1A: Orientation, Assessment, and Commuity Building

Module 1B: Teacher Self-Awareness

Module 2A: Understanding the Nonpersistent Student including:

achievement motivation

locus of control

learning style is....

learning styles

sociological factors

teacher behaviors that communicate positive expectations

disruptive behavior is...

Each participant received the following publications addressing essential characteristics of effective instruction for minority students:

Learning to Persist/Persisting to Learn

Cross-Cultural Communication: An Essential Dimension of Effective Education

Improving Black Student Achievement.

Inservice activities were presented at the elementary school from November to March and consisted of: an orientation session that included goals and objectives relating to the proposed staff

development; completion of a persistence assessment inventory; and the use of cooperative learning groups to analyze and to share with the total group results of the persistence assessment inventory. Other sessions introduced the following topics: Persistence; Learning Styles; Improving Student Achievement with Esteem Building and Responsibility Development, and Teacher Behaviors That Communicate Positive Expectations.

This component of the practicum was presented through lecture and use of overhead transparencies, peer coaching, and peer support. The cooperative process of sharing ideas, problem solving, and giving/receiving feedback was simulated throughout the inservice activities. Resources and materials that were available at the Teachers Resource Center were displayed or discussed at each session. Support services available (individual or small group consultations and classroom follow-up) were constantly reiterated.

Significant difficulties were encountered during the eight month implementation of this practicum. Due to administrative difficulties at the middle school, the writer was unable to implement the practicum process as proposed.

Recently, this state implemented an early retirement program which produced a "domino" effect on central office personnel. To improve local test scores, the new administration brought in consultants to provide Cognitive Process of Instruction Training in reading comprehension skills and informative writing skills. Staff development was provided to the division's elementary school and middle school teachers on a weekly basis from November to January. This severely limited access to the one participating elementary school.

Some positive, unexpected events occurred. Due to the writer's involvement with the one elementary school's faculty, she was invited to speak on "Characteristics of Four Year Olds" to parents of at-risk students enrolled in Pre-K classes that are housed in two of the division's elementary schools. Many of the targeted fourth and fifth grade students involved in this practicum had younger siblings enrolled in this program. These Pre-K students are at- risk as many of the homes lack educational resources and many of the parents did not complete high school. Home instructional strategies were demonstrated and the opportunity to enroll in adult learning classes within the community were discussed.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND DISSEMINATION

Results

The problem that existed in this writer's work setting was the underrepresentation of minority students in gifted programs and the overrepresentation of minority students in the at-risk program. Factors that contributed to the underserving of minority students in gifted programs were the over-reliance on standardized test scores to establish a potential pool of gifted minority students and a lack of teacher advocates. Teachers also had received inadequate training of cultural characteristics of minority students and when they misinterpreted or disregarded cultural diversity, they helped to contribute to minority students lowered self-esteem, lowered achievement, and lowered self-expectations. If the situation was improved, more of the division's minority students would be receiving gifted services and there would be a significant reduction in the number of minority students (specifically blacks) identified in the at-risk program at one elementary school.

The solution to the underrepresentation of minority students was to improve the identification process through staff development and to extend the case study approach to fulfill eligibility criteria. In the case of improving at-risk minority student success, the solution was to establish a staff development program that included: teaching students to persist in their learning; incorporating learning style differences into instruction; and helping black students to build a positive self-concept. This aspect of the staff development program was applicable to both teachers of the gifted and teachers of the

at-risk population.

The goals of this practicum were that more minority students would participate in gifted programs and that minority students would improve their academic achievement.

Specific objectives were designed to achieve these goals. Each objective is listed below followed by the results related to that objective.

Objective 1: By February 15, 1993, based on the December 1992 division's enrollment figures, 4% of the total minority student population will be receiving gifted services.

Results indicated that 4% of the division's (K-12) minority student population were receiving gifted services compared to 11% of the white student population. During the 1992-93 school year, again 0% of the 1% of the Hispanic/Asian population were not represented while 11% of the 40% whites were represented. Blacks-Non-Hispanic comprised 59% of the student population.

Table 4

Comparison of Student Population

	Total Population		Identified G/T	
	1992	1993	1992	1993
Blacks-Non-Hispanic	1124	1198	3%	4%
White	738	832	13%	11%
Hispanics	22	20	0%	0%
Asian	4	1	0%	0%

On at least two occasions, students were recommended to

"bridge" the program for one, complete academic year.

At the kindergarten and first grade level, no referrals were made for possible placement in gifted programs. Two minority parent nominations were received and those students were determined eligible for gifted services although their standardized tests scores would not have placed them in the "pool" of potential candidates. Teacher advocates for nominating minority students as potential candidates were those teachers who attended the inservice on "Recognizing and Nurturing Minority Learners" and who also had completed training in characteristics of giftedness. Teacher advocates nominated seven students as possible candidates for gifted programs and all seven students were determined eligible for gifted programs.

Objective 2: By the end of the third grading period in the 1992-93 School Year, 80% of the students identified in the bottom quartile at one elementary school (grades 4 & 5) and at the middle school (grades 6 - 8) will improve at least one letter grade in one academic area as compared with report cards received at the end of the first grading period.

The original objective was to include students from the middle school. Due to adminstrative difficulties at the middle school, the practicum could not be implemented.

At the one participating elementary school, 19 students were identified as scoring in the bottom quartile in the fourth grade and 11 students were identified as scoring in the bottom quartile in the fifth grade.

Fifteen of the 19 students in the fourth grade improved their grades in one academic area as compared with report card grades received at the end of the first grading period. Four students did not

improve their grades but the letter grade remained the same and no letter grade was a failing grade.

All academic areas compared were those that corresponed to the identified academic area on the bottom quartile roster.

Table 5

Fourth Grade Elementary School Bottom Quartile Students

Total Number of Students Identified - 19				
Grade 4	B/M	B/F	W/M	W/F
Bottom Quartile	12	4	2	1
Improved at least one letter grade	8	4	2	1
Grade remained the same - no failing grade	4			

Six of the 11 students in the fifth grade improved their grades in one academic area as compared with report card grades received at the end of the first grading period. Five students did not improve their grades. Four students grades remained the same but no letter grade was a failing grade. Only one student reversed the procedure and received a failing grade after obtaining a passing grade for the first marking period. It appears school attendance and other environmental factors may have caused that isolated reversal.

Table 6

Fifth Grade Elementary School Bottom Quartile Students

Total Number of Students Identified - 11

Grade 5	B/M	B/F	W/M	W/F
Bottom Quartile	6	4	1	0
Improved at least one letter grade	3	3	0	0
Grade remained the same - no failing grade	2	1	1	0
Reversed passing grade to failing grade	1	0	0	0

Discussion

A review and interpretation of the data indicates that objective one was totally achieved. The determination that the majority of the nominations came from the gleaning of test scores forced the issue of creating an alternative method of establishing a "pool" of students. It appears that this procedure was a major limitation to the identification of minority students as the those standardized instruments contain cultural bias and depends upon traditional measures of performance (VanTassel-Baska, 1981). The expanded case study was recommended as it allowed a narrative section on

classroom observations/behaviors and the inclusion of work samples (Bessant-Byrd & Lang, 1990; Rhoades, 1992; VanTassel-Baska, 1981). It was observed during inschool screening committee meetings that teachers were not adequately trained in gifted characteristics and tended to report from "grade books" which screened out many qualified students (Marland, 1972 and Rhoades, 1992). Identification criteria corresponded to the current level of services, namely the academic areas (Roedell, Jackson, and Robinson, 1980; VanTassel-Baska, 1981). The "bridging" concept was implemented on two occasions as the county placement committee determined that two students should be provided the opportunity of inclusion rather than exclusion for one, complete academic year (Bessant-Byrd & Lang, 1990). Summary statements of parent checklists and parent comments were included in the identification/placement procedures (VanTassel-Baska, 1981). Objective two was not totally achieved although significant growth did occur. Twenty-one out of 30 students did improve their grades although documentation of demographics proved that the parents had few resources available to provide an educational home environment (Haberman, 1991; Roades, 1992). Although no formal evaluation questionnaires were completed by participants of the at-risk staff development component, informal discussions mentioned awareness of teacher expectations, learning styles (Ewing & Yong, 1992), and cultural diversity provided a perception that assisted with classroom climate and instructional strategies. When educators implement these instructional strategies at the elementary level and include techniques to enhance the quality of student work, students should benefit as they progress upward to high school (Levin, 1988).

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that characteristics of giftedness and "Recognizing and Nurturing Giftedness in Minority Learners" be offered annually as an part of the gifted staff develoment program to instructional staff.

2. It is recommended that an alternative method of identification for the K-1 population be investigated rather than rely on teacher nominations.

3. It is recommended that the participting elementary school continue to provide staff development on the topic minority students and school success based on support and materials from Mid-Atlantic Center for Race Equity.

Dissemination

This practicum was shared with local regional gifted coordinators and with neighboring gifted coordinators. The at-risk component was shared with local central office staff and parts of the practicum are being used in the writer's new position in another school division.

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